

Last week, President Obama delivered his first speech from the Oval Office on the single greatest challenge our nation faces: how we supply and consume energy.

The searing images we're seeing from the Gulf Coast -- of the families who lost loved ones, of people out of work and of oil-coated birds and dolphins -- are daily reminders of what's at stake when we drill, baby, drill.

The truth is that we are drilling 150 miles offshore and one mile below the earth's surface because we have run out of accessible oil. Most shocking is how small a difference this oil makes to our energy needs. The 35-60,000 barrels spewing daily from the Gulf floor would be enough to power our nation's cars for just four minutes.

Whether from the Gulf of Mexico or Persian Gulf, we cannot meet our nation's energy needs by drilling. We are at a precipice, and I stand firmly with President Obama when it comes to Congress passing legislation that arms the nation with clean energy.

But frankly, we need to do more on these issues, especially by addressing transportation and how we build in our communities.

The transportation sector accounts for almost three-quarters of U.S. oil consumption and one-third of our carbon emissions. If we really want to break our dependence on oil and improve our global competitiveness, we must focus on the way people commute and move goods.

Being truly aggressive about where and how we build can save even more money and energy -- with the potential to cut carbon pollution 12-16 percent by 2030 and save more than a million barrels of oil a day.

This is not the first thing that comes to mind for most people, but to ensure our energy security, we need a comprehensive approach. I hope this becomes part of the future message and, more importantly, a key focus of Congressional action.